The Nightingale

BY RICHARD WASHBURN CHILD

She Didn't Believe There Was Anything Good in Him.

A YOUNG man, with a young woman clinging to his arm, walked slowly toward the end of the pier. A shadow, grotesque, silent, menacing through the moon-silvered mists which hung above the shoreline of the deserted summer estate had followed them to the point where the pier joined the rocks and where a clump of rare junipers had been planted by the landscape architect, and there this skulking figure, lean, catlike, unseen, crouched low.

The fog had brought its suggestion of mystery and terror; the cold made the young man disengage the arm held so tightly by the young woman, so that he might fasten the topmost button of his coat.

"We oughtn't to come out here," the girl said. "Listen Denny!"

"S'all right; that's the tide shaking the pier. We got to go somewhere for a walk. That's what you came way out here to East Harbor for—so's we both could get outdoors sometimes. Maybe he ain't thinking of us, anyhow."

"When did you hear?"

"I saw it in the Bulletin. I called you up at the office the first I heard of it, and they said you was taking dictation. He went outside just a week ago. I wished I'd never seen his face! I wished I'd never been up there with him!"

The girl, whose slight figure seemed insufficient to carry as much golden hair as filled her jaunty hat, glanced up quickly at the sound of desperate fear and hate in her lover's voice.

"Don't talk so," she pleaded, with a sympathy in her tone which comes from few who have not suffered the agonies of the soul. "Denny, you've got me! Everything's all right, Denny. Let's sit down here. You've lived it down, Denny. We ought to be thankful—your good job, your future. Nobody can say anything against you to me. Only, Denny—listen: Let's get married—let's get married tomorrow."

The man was taller than she. He put one of his nervous hands on her slight shoulder, and she smiled.

"I thought it was you who said we'd better wait until we could send word to your mother out in Dakota. You told her the whole story. That was the plan. Then, if anything came up and it was known that I had served my eighteen months up there, where——"

"Don't say it!" she exclaimed, with passion. "We promised not to mention anything of that, Denny."

"You're not sorry—now?" he asked fiercely.

"Sorry! Me sorry? Why, Denny, I was glad—gladder than I ever was in my life when you said you loved me. At the bottom, you were so good—the best man I ever knew. And then these two years that made us both grow so much, Denny—like plants that found the sunlight. And these two years wiped out all the past. Sorry? Me sorry? Why, I only wanted you, Denny—good or bad—I wanted you."

He drew in a long breath and put his arm about her, holding her to him closely. He turned her face upward and kissed her responsive lips.

"What's that, Denny—that hard thing in your pocket?" she cried out. "I won't have him wipe me out like a dog, Alice. I bought it. He'd kill. He has it bred in his bone. When they caught him—it was for burglary—he jumped from the platform of an elevated station onto an electric sign, and he left an inspector and a ticket-chopper waiting for the ambulance."

"He was such a nice-appearing boy!" she exclaimed. "Manners and all! Jennie Boyden and I never knew about the truth. I wouldn't have believed it. There he was, standing at the bottom of the steps where I boarded, and telling me that no girl ever meant anything to him but me. And saying he could be a different man if I loved him—if I'd only say so. He thought I did love him. He said he'd rather die than not to have me love him. Oh, what would I have done if I'd known the kind of man he was! And I said, 'Well, you come for me Thursday.' But I never knew. I never heard a word till you——"

"Brought word from him," finished Denny. "But you didn't love him—at all?"

"No, no, no!"

"Well, that's it," he said. "There's something about him that tricks everybody—some power. It was that way up there. The warden had a quartet made up from the boys!"

"Don't, Denny!"

"Yes, I will. I want to tell you. I've heard this man sing in that quartet. The bass was a bank-teller, forty-five, with ten more years to go. And this man, always lean and clean and white, and a body slender and like a cat, and a tenor voice—what a tenor voice!—sweet, beautiful, and terrible. He was like a snake with a bird's voice. They called him 'the Nightingale.'"

"'The Nightingale,'" repeated Alice, with a shudder.

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THERE was a long silence, in which they sat side by side, looking out into the silver-frosted mist over the salt water.

"It's cold, Denny," said the girl suddenly.

He started, but he neglected her statement. He said.

"He will kill." Terror came into her eyes. "Yes; he will kill," Denny repeated, with his square jaw set firmly. "He said to me: 'Take this message to her. She would have loved me. That is life to me—all the life there's left. You're going out. You tell her the truth. She don't know it. But tell her I say to wait for me. Tell her I'll go straight.' Then when——"

"We've loved each other, haven't we, Denny?" she interrupted sharply. "I never cared a thing for him. But you!"

He felt for her gloved hand and squeezed it.

"But he'll come, and he'll come to kill. That's like his kind—their white, long fingers and all strung with nerves. He was eating his heart out for you. He'll come. He'll kill if he can. Didn't he write, 'I give you notice'? That's like him."

The girl suddenly threw back her head and addressed the high vault of heaven.

"What have we done to deserve this? Haven't we been good? Haven't we earned our happiness? What have we done?"

"Or I'll kill him," said Denny, the rows of his even, white teeth clicking together. "I'd kill him, and then they'd send me back."

"No, no, no!" she whimpered. "He won't come—maybe. Maybe he'll die. Something will happen. I'll ask help."

"Where?" said Denny. "From the police? Then I'll be known again. I'd lose the job. Then where's the living down the one big mistake? I'd rather have him get me, Alice. I'd rather have him wipe me out."

"Denny!" she gasped, clinging to his arm and looking up into his brown eyes. "Don't you worry, Denny. I love you. Whatever could happen, I'd love you, Denny. I'm so cold now. Let's go back to the village. I'm so cold."

"Gee—cold!" exclaimed the man. "All right. Let's go back."

They jumped up and started toward the shore end of the long pier, which, swung by the tide, bumped [illegible] behind them, and the mists over the salt bay swayed in the faint stir of the penetrating Winter wind.

"I've been making the curtains for the living room," Alice said suddenly. "I left the ends so that we could fix them for any length of window. Denny, we——"

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FAR away there sounded across the cold night air the first plaintive bars of "Annie Laurie" in a tenor as fine and clear as the song of some little bird, sweet yet sharp and needle-like—horrible in its sweetness. The man caught the girl's wrist. Both of them stopped as if suddenly a precipice had yawned before them.

"He's come!" Denny said in a hoarse whisper.

"The Nightingale!"

"It's him. It's just like him. He's a fiend, I tell you. Stand up, Alice—stand up, dear. He's followed us. Maybe this is the end. Stand up, Alice. Be a brave girl."

The birdlike song ceased suddenly with a sharp, high note.

"Remember this, Alice," Denny whispered hoarsely, "I've loved you, just you. You wouldn't forget that, would you?"

From her throat there came a wordless sound of fear and grief. But immediately she said:

"I'm not a coward, Denny. I'm a woman. I'm your Alice."

The silence seemed to pulsate. The little stenographer, facing the crisis, did her best to think and her best to pray.

"The boat—the rowboat—Denny!" she whispered.

"No oars," he said.

His hand was on the weapon in his pocket.

"Oh, he has me cornered," he went on. "He don't mind the risk of it. What he wants is the torture of it. He wants it to be me, but he don't care if it's him. That's the Nightingale."

"Denny!"

"What is it?"

"You mustn't—you mustn't kill." She clutched at his shoulders. "It would leave me alone just the same—alone in life—all, all alone. You—Thou shalt not kill!'"

Again the tenor voice, thin, penetrating, issued forth from the Nightingale's lips. The song went on, piping upward. It came toward them where they stood outlined against the silvery light.

"He could kill me, but I can't place him," Denny said hoarsely. "It'll all shadows—all dark there. And the dark is filled with song—filled with song."

"'Thou shalt not kill,'" Alice said again. "Denny, listen. Denny!"

"I hear, little girl," he answered.

"Do you love me? Give it to me."

The song from the dark ceased suddenly.

"It's like him," said Denny, breathing hard. "He knows there is no escape for me. He can see us. His song—it's like him—just like him."

The girl had thrown one arm about her man. With the fingers of the other hand she was clutching, clutching, clutching. Her fingers moved like things of separate intelligence—insinuating, restless, persistent personalities. They crept into the hand which grasped the newly-purchased revolver. They loosened the strong fingers.

"Denny!"

"What?"

"Give it to me!"

He yielded like a man dazed. With a quick motion of her hand, she flung the chilly weapon over the edge of the pier. It fell into the water with a splash—a startling interruption of the still night.

"What have you done?" her lover gasped.

"Oh, now Denny, you'll always belong to me," she said. "Even if he kills you, maybe some time we'll be together once more. You're my Denny."

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THE man dropped his hands limp at his thighs. The voice of the Nightingale took up the melody again. Out into the cold air came the needlelike sweetness.

"Through his thin, red lips," said Denny.

"Nearer now!" gasped Alice, staring at the misty darkness till her eyes burned.

The song ceased. The moon, low in the sky, appeared to brighten behind them, the shadows fell away, and out of the smother of dark, like a figure developing upon a photographic plate, came the outline of the Nightingale.

The girl threw herself in front of her lover.

"Well, here I am," whined the Nightingale, sliding toward them. "You expected me, Denny?" The other man did not speak. "You know what I come for, eh? You two! And me three years—knawing on the lining of my own mouth—sometimes till it bled—up there. Nice moonlight, eh? No shadows of bars on the floor here, eh? Get out from in front of that man, Alice Coran."

"I won't."

"Plenty of time," replied the Nightingale, with a sneer.

His voice broke out again to a little flight of terrible melody, and, as he sang he came nearer until Alice could see that his arms were crossed, and the gleam of a revolver barrel, resting easily in the curve of one elbow, became visible—and nearer, until the moonlight fell upon his lean face.

The Nightingale was still young, but the penitentiary had turned his skin a ghastly, pasty color upon which the thin lines of his lips were vivid and the shadows of his nostrils and his heavy eyebrows were grotesquely emphasized. His corded neck gave some indication of his wiry, catlike strength, and this neck was eternally twisting; the shoulders beneath were ever restless under their covering.

He had trailed his victim unwilling to strike until the dramatic moment. That was like him. He was dressed almost jauntily in a suit of dark brown which was none too full to conceal the fact that he was powerful in shoulders and thighs, and spare of flesh where less sinewy men carry useless weight. For warmth, he wore a sweater, the edges of which showed from under his waistcoat. There were gloves on his hands—old gloves to be sure, borrowed from some pal who had "welcomed him out" of the penitentiary, and in his buttonhole he wore a rose so white that it appeared as a symbol of the moon and the cold and of bloodless things. It was all quite like him—quite like the Nightingale.

The frightened eyes of the young woman stared at the white-petaled rosebud there in his buttonhole.

"We can talk—us three for a while," said the discharged convict. "Don't cling to him so—it makes me sick. You ain't saving him. I could kill you both, couldn't I? What's the odds? Listen! I've been thinking. I used to think at night, Denny, old skyrocket, you ought to knew. You've been there. I thought on my cot, and I thought in the chapel, and I thought all around everywhere behind the bloody stones and the concrete. Believe me, I've become a philosopher, and the first thing a philosopher has got to do is not to care what happens to him. One or two lives ain't anything more or less. Let it go at that. Only, of course, I've waited for this evening a long while. There was a time when I liked to feel red and lash out; now I want to take it all easy. I got my wish, Denny—you and me is face to face. There ain't any hurry. I like to taste it all. I like to smell it and touch it to my lips and taste a little of it. Then comes a big swallow. Gee, won't I love it!"

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THE other man stared at the sneering, curled thin lips through which these words came, but he did not flinch. Alice waited for the tremor which the darting tongue of a snake with the voice of a bird might bring, but none came.

"Denny!" she said.

"Let him kill me," her lover answered, in a clear, deep voice.

"Why don't you beg, Denny? That's what a man does who double-crosses his friend. I might let you off. I might give you a chance to pull the gun you carry. Why didn't you pull it when I sang up to you, Denny? Because you knew you'd have to go back—up there—inside—for life. That's the best they'd give you, Denny—manslaughter. There wasn't much for you to do but hope I wouldn't kill you. Well——"

"Well, what?"

"Why don't you beg?"

"I ain't going to beg," replied the other, disengaging himself from the girls' clinging arms. "Go to it. Shoot!"

Suddenly the higher voice of Alice rang out.

"What's he going to beg for? He never did anything to you!"

"He took you—after promising to speak for me. He took you—didn't he?—when I was up there? I wanted to square it with you, so I told him to tell you the truth about me. But he and you—took everything—everything I had—plans and hopes—all I ever wanted! Pah! I can't wait. I know what I came for." He snapped the gun up into the air and swung it downward. "I never loved you!"

Alice almost shouted the words. The Nightingale turned toward her.

"I told him so. If you want to kill anybody—kill me," she said.

"You would have loved me. I'd have made you love me," the Nightingale replied, in a vicious whisper. "There never was anything like you to make me—good."

"Good! You—good!" exclaimed the girl.

"You don't believe there's anything good in me?"

He came closer to her and peered at her, as if suddenly he was imitating a man in fear.

"No—nothing," she said defiantly; "not even your love. Even that was bad—it was all for you. Not even your love was good."

The Nightingale stared at her as if he were dazed.

"Listen," he said, after a second. "You mean that? Say it slow—you mean that?"

The girl stared at him, her mouth twisting.

"No," she said, at last.

"No—what?"

"No; I don't mean that," she said slowly. "I didn't meant it."

"He's playing with you!" Denny exclaimed. "Don't believe in him."

"I'm not going to blacken my heart with that lie," she answered stubbornly. Before God, I believe there's something good in him!"

THE BOAT WAS COMING BACK—THERE WAS ONLY ONE MAN IN IT.

AN explosive noise came from the Nightingale's throat. "I oughta been an actor," he said, after a pause, with a coarseness in his voice which, after the silence, shocked them both. "Never mind. There was months of torture. Well, this night will pay for it. Listen! Answer me this: Why didn't you pull your gun, Denny?"

"I haven't any gun."

"You lie!"

"No," said Alice "that's the truth."

The Nightingale stepped toward her and, with a quick motion of his gloved hand, caught her chin and turned her face into the moonlight.

"You'd believe me, wouldn't you?" she said, meeting his gaze.

"Yes."

"Well, when we heard you, I flung it into the water. That was the splash."

"The poor fool let you do that, did he?"

"It was my idea," said Alice, through chattering teeth. "I'd rather have him dead than——"

She choked. He released her chin at the moment that the other man had crouched to spring at him.

"You love him a lot!" sneered the Nightingale, looking from her to the man. "Oh, I know all about both of you. He's got a job and a salary, and has covered his tracks. He's going straight. Maybe he and you want to get married right away. Don't I know all that? Don't I? Didn't I think of that myself? Didn't I? I've got this here gun in my hand. Why don't you beg, Denny? Why don't you run?"

Denny gave a growl of rage.

"I'd kill him; wouldn't I, Alice?" asked the Nightingale.

"Don't you answer," said her lover. "Can't you see he's playing with us like a cat that's got a pair of mice."

The Nightingale laughed. He threw back his head and, through his thin lips, his voice issued forth again, sweet but terrible, simulating joyousness but horrible in its needlelike quality.

Suddenly he clipped off a note and whirled about toward the girl.

"Why wouldn't I kill him? They'd get me for it—but what's that to me? You love each other, eh? That means I get you both with one shot, maybe—all in one shot, maybe—all in one shot, eh? Gee, but ain't it a beautiful night! Look at them mists!"

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A cloud passed over the moon. Far away beyond the inlet, on the waters of the Sound, a steamer behind the fog lifted its voice in a tremulous bass note. The rowboat was bumping against the pier; the little waves lapped at the piles. Again the Nightingale spoke.

"Denny, you was always a good feller—up there. I learned to like you, Denny. Do one more thing for me. And then—maybe——"

"What do you want?" the other asked sullenly.

"Let me kiss your girl—just once, Denny."

The answer was a growl.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" asked the Nightingale.

He was sliding over toward her; suddenly he made a dart of his head and shoulders. He seized her arm.

Denny was too quick for him; the girl's lover leaped forward; he struck the Nightingale a crashing impact in the face. The discharged convict staggered back, clawing at the air with his left hand.

"Now kill!" roared Denny. "You've got the gun. Do it!"

The Nightingale, however, began to laugh.

"Not yet, Denny," he gurgled, looking down at the gleaming weapon in his hand. "Ho, ho, ho! Not yet! We ain't begun our little play. Maybe you're right and Alice is wrong, Denny. I'm all bad, eh? So what can you expect from me, eh? Something nice? Something interesting? So let's look around."

He backed away toward the end of the pier and, with a quick thrust of his pointed chin, looked over the edge. He was humming to himself a little quiet tune which was almost like a whispered soprano.

"Hello—a rowboat—a rowboat, and no oars!" he exclaimed. "No oars! Maybe somebody uses this boat and has hid the oars. What's over there?" He pointed with his left hand through the fog at the blurred mass of shadow which was the shore across the bay. "That's where the state road runs, ain't it? Well, lets look."

A long box built of heavy boards rested along the top of the pier; the Nightingale, standing over it, braced his legs, pulled upward, and, with a shriek, the staple which held the padlock came out of the wood. He lifted the hinged cover and, glancing over his shoulder so that his victims might not spring on him from behind, he felt around in the interior.

"Here they are," he exclaimed, "the oars! Ha, ha, Denny, if you'd only had these; you and your girl could have made your getaway! You could have taken a little row when you heard me singing. Well, Denny, now it's you and me will take a little row—a cold little row."

The girl uttered a cry.

"What's the matter?" protested the Nightingale. "You ain't going to object to his going for a little row with an old friend? You ain't going to object if I don't shoot him down like a dog?"

"I'll go, too," Alice begged.

But the Nightingale shook his head.

"'Tisn't safe for three. Two's enough. We'll take our little row, and then——"

"Then?"

"Why, one of us will come back for you, little girl. You wait here. One of us will come back—that's what I hope."

Denny stepped forward.

"You got a gun," he said accusingly.

"That's so!" the Nightingale said, with mock astonishment, glancing down at the weapon in his hand. "What will we do about that, I wonder? Suppose I throw it over after we've started? How'd that be? The gun won't be any use to me, anyhow—after this beautiful night. I meant to shoot you with it, but that's rough work. So, Denny, you climb down and sit in the seat in the stern. I'm going to row, Denny. We'll start fair."

He threw back his head and laughed heartily. The girl's lover took a deep breath; he shrugged his shoulders and clenched his hands.

"I'll go," he said.

"No, no, no!" sobbed Alice.

The Nightingale's face twisted about in one of those spasms of expression which characterized him.

"Say, what's the matter?" he asked, in his evil whine. "You didn't love me, and you loved him. What was wrong with that? You two are planning to get married and go straight. What's wrong with that? I gnawed out the lining of my mouth. But what's that? That's nothing. I don't count—I'm nobody. And then, little girl, you just said there was some good in me. That ought to make a hit with me, hadn't it? And I loved you and still love you, don't I? So why not let your Denny go for a little row with me?" He coughed. "It's better than seeing him drop on this pier and go crawling and and scratching around on the boards, ain't it?"

The muff dropped from her limp hands.

"Denny!" she gasped.

He put his arms about her.

"It's a chance," he whispered.

"Just a little row," whined the Nightingale. "Come!"

Denny uttered a growl and dropped over the edge of the pier into the bottom of the little craft.

"Well," said the Nightingale, "it certainly is a beautiful night."

He sat down on the edge of the pier, facing the man below, the revolver still in his hand. Then he threw the oars down and leaped after them into the boat.

Alice clutched at the sleeves of her coat, plucking at the cloth. The world for her grew dizzy and whirled about until black water and silvery moon and frosted mists were all a seething of neutral gray. Out of this came to her the sound of the oarlocks—clack-clack, clack-clask! The little boat was sliding away into the mists.

"Wait!" came the voice of the Nightingale. "One of us will come for you. I said I'd throw this thing away. Listen!"

"Alice!"

It was the voice of her lover now sounding over the water.

She raised her head and saw that the fog had nearly shut off the sight of the craft in which the two men sat, as impersonal to the vision as two bags of meal upon the seats.

"Go back to the village!" Denny called to her. "For the love of heaven, don't wait—don't wait!"

Clack-clack, clack-clack! The oarlocks, moving monotonously under the human hands, sounded like some monstrous clerk of eternity. Clack-clack, clack-clack! Fainter and fainter. She could hear the little waves again lapping at the piles below her. The cold crept down her neck and up her sleeves, but it was not as cruel as the cold within. At 4 o'clock that afternoon she had been copying mail orders on her typewriting machine beside a radiator which had hissed. This seemed many centuries ago. The sound of the oars was now barely audible. Alice threw herself down on her knees and stared out into the gray blank, from which there now came no sight, no sound—nothing but the salty, cold breath of the sea.

"Denny!" she called. "Denny!"

The fog absorbed her cry. The moon stared down.

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FAR off, from across the narrow bay, beyond the ridge of Summer estates on the farther shore, there sounded faintly the strokes of the great clock in the village tower. It was 9. The little stenographer took her knuckles between her white teeth. She stared into the fog, which answered nothing. Her aching eyes asked it questions, her yearning ears asked it questions, but the fog answered nothing.

"Denny!" she called. "Denny!"

There was no answer. Denny had gone with the Nightingale. She was alone. Denny had warned her to go back. The mystery of the fog held her there at the edge of Fothergill's pier, twisting her cold wrists in the grip of her cold hands under the moon.

Now and then she raised her gaze to this wintry moon, upon which there advanced a thousand little clouds, dragging after them across the sky a great black mass of obscurity. The little clouds slid over the moon's face, turning the fog from silver to thick gray.

Alice could see the black mass of storm clouds behind them moving on ponderously. These clouds would smother the moon. Alice wondered vaguely why the moon did not run away across the sky and elude them. As she gazed up, strands of her own golden hair were slapped across her face by the freshening breeze coming over the black water. The fog was running past her now, as if it had seen a terrible sight from which it fled.

"Denny!" she called.

The wind stuffed the name of her lover back into her mouth, but it brought another sound through the black night—sound of oarlocks again.

Clack-clack, clack-clack!

Alice did not dare to call again.

The boat was coming back. Clack-clack, clack-clack! The sound was nearer, the strokes were faster now.

She wanted to call out during these terrible minutes, but something within her pleaded with her not to do so. Instead, she crawled to the edge of the pier and stared down at the smothering blackness.

The clack of the oarlocks was almost beneath her at last.

The moon struggled to break through some thin place in the somber blanket which had covered her. A last suffusion of her radiance came down upon the sea. There was only one man in the boat. His form, sitting in the rower's seat, was as impersonal as a bag of meal.

Alice did not dare to call out.

Something said to her——

The boat bumped the piles below her.

"Alice!" the voice of her lover called.

"Denny!"

"Here, take this." He reached above him, holding something toward her until he felt her hand close about it. "He sent it to you. It's that white rose he wore."

Denny lifted himself onto the edge of the pier, and, reaching forward and taking her into his arms, he stared out across the waters as if he were in a dream.

"Denny!" she said. "Denny, speak to me! There's no blood on your head?"

"Listen!" he commanded.

Far away from the opposite shore a birdlike tenor voice filled the air with a tremulous melody, sweet yet terrible—the opening bars of "Annie Laurie."

"Listen!" he cried, clasping her close to him. "Listen! It's the Nightingale!"

(Copyright, 1924.)

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"HELLO—A ROWBOAT—A ROWBOAT AND NO OARS!"

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Tune Forgotten Since Columbus May Be Played on Chimes of Dijon

BY STERLING HEILIG.

DIJON, France, August 28.

A MOST beautiful old forgotten tune, they say, will be sprung upon the world, which no human being had heard, they say, since a period before Columbus discovered America.

Will it be popular?

It will have a better start than any modern tune has ever enjoyed. It will be hastily transcribed to music paper and published widely, if only as a curiosity. Cable agencies will have men listening at Dijon to describe its style and tell how the waiting crowds liked it.

Because the whole affair is remarkable.

The tune has been the Riddle of Dijon, you might say, for centuries. Many authorities have doubted if it ever existed. Even today the mass of citizens know nothing new about the subject.

Yet the tune (or what they believe to be the tune) has been discovered in two great old iron boxes, nearly the size of trunks, in or beside the kitchens of the ancient Dukes of Burgundy!

Now, for the story.

On the tower of Notre Dame Church in Dijon, oldtime capital of the nonexistent Dukes of Burgundy, is the most ancient mechanical clock chime that still works and strikes today in Europe.

That is, the three famous old super-life-size figures up there still strike certain hours. Tourists turn out "to hear Jacquemart" and his family strike 2:45 P.M.

On top the tower is a vast dome of ornamental ironwork, holding great and lesser bells and considerable ancient machinery. Seated by it, on the outside, is this lay figure of a man of really giant size, in strange old gay clothes and absurd high hat of felt, smoking a long pipe. Hat and clothes are renewed, about once in 50 years, but the pipe was put into his mouth on Easter Day, 4557, when Jacquemart was already 200 years old.

He is Jacquemart. Previous to the year 1383, he sat on the tower of the Town Hall of Coutrai, in Belgium. He raised his arm, and, with a flourish, struck the hour "and played a most beautiful air," as Froissart, the old chronicle writer, tells "by means of the most beautiful mechanism of the low countries or beyond the seas!"

Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, having some claim on the free cities, asked for Jacquemart and was refused. He went to war (for a mechanical clock!), razed the walls of Coutrai, hanged the notables, decimated a rich population, and brought Jacquemart in triumph to his capital of Dijon.

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TODAY, it is the same Jacquemart. A hundred years before America was discovered they placed him where he still sits, on top of this tower at Dijon, hammering the hours. In 1654 they gave him a wife, Barbe, who rings the half hours. In 1714 he added the child, Claude, to pound the quarters. Then, as late as 1895, the Dijonnais, who never tire of Jacquemart, added a second kid, naked and wooden, like a jointed doll, but really big, indeed, who can ring the minutes when the clock is set for him to operate. He has a name. He is Aristide.

Tourists always hope to hear Little Naked Aristide ring the minutes. The machinery is all there. For years after 1895 he functioned. Also, there is a saying that Little Aristide should ring the hour of his birth on every Sunday at 57 minutes after the noon hour.

Dong! Dong! Jacquemart pounds his hammer twelve times. Dang! the lady hits her bell one clip. Ding! Claude, the elder son, rings the third quarter. Then, silence! Little Aristide refuses "to function," even on a Sunday. He is all ready, but they "do not want him to wear out his works!"

Such is the outline story for tourists, absolutely truthful, as far as it goes.

But there has always been a silent undercurrent of old feeling in Dijon as of something lacking, which the successive additions to the family could not quite replace, and which takes the snap out of even the performance of Little Aristide.

Jacquemart hammers the hours like a blacksmith. They love Jacquemart, but there is unspoken, tender discontent. It is not Jacquemart's fault. Then, what?

That tune! That "most beautiful air" which Froissart heard Jacquemart ring on the bells at Coutrai, has always been the riddle of Dijon, although no citizen will regret its absence openly.

Did Dijon have the tune? There are references in old local chronicles to "Jacquemart playing finely," and to "Jacquemart, always capable." Don't that mean more than hammering twelve strokes? There's not a peasant child for thirty miles round Dijon who does not know that "Jacquemart played a tune!"

No passage can be found which tells about the loss of the tune. Yet, certainly up there there are more bells than Jacquemart and his family strike—and fixtures for other bells which have disappeared!

Yes, Dijon had the tune. But the transfer from Coutrai happened so long ago! Probably Jacquemart was playing the tune, here in Dijon, when Columbus was a young fellow! Came, then, wars and sieges, burnings and alarms.

Who knows?

Now, for the kitchens, where they found the boxes. They are the most marvelous old kitchens, unique in the world, the only complete and perfect remains of their kind.

Here gilded honey cakes, still sold as the glory of Dijon, were invented for the court of Bergundy on occasion of Christmas day, 1361.

These vast hearths, chimneys, spits and ovens were old while America was still unknown. Destructive fires in two different centuries have left nothing of the ancient palace but an isolated tower, which contains the kitchens built into the present palace museum.

But 12 oxen could be roasted entire, simultaneously, in the kitchens. Their arch is wonderfully high, with vent holes to admit light and permit the smoke of cooking to escape. They date almost before Gothic.

The court of Burgundy in those days led the cookery of the world, outside of Constantinople, then still ruled by the emperor, successor to Caesar, before the Turks came, stunning civilization.

Well, the dukes got their sauce cooks from Constantinople. A hundred gentlemen were invited daily to the palace dinner. Half as many noble strangers and the court proper trebled the number, says the cotemporary chronicler, Chastellain. In 1381 two Dijon poultry dealers sold Aubin Cousin, the duke's butcher, a single bill of 1,000 chickens, 200 geese, 6,000 eggs and 400 great cheeses. Another receipt exists for 48,000 breads.

Olivier de la Marche tells of a ducal "provision hunt" that netted 11 deer, 350 wild ducks, 19 wild geese, 680 wild pigeons, 2 bears and and 275 ring doves.

Around the kitchens are 18 cooking chimneys. Many are for roasting at the spit. At the courts of France and England they were living on roast meats and boiled vegetables, but at Dijon when Jacquemart arrived De la Marche says "all were served with sauces and ragouts, richly spiced, down to the rank of squires, likewise so served on fete days."

Here remain unique in the world two middle-age sauce furnaces, each with 12 lids and a great stone-heating table covered with terra cotta squares—first range and chafing dish in the world outside of Constantinople.

Here the "imported chef" of the old dukes concocted Byzantine sauces and delicacies whose very ingredients, spices and condiments came straight from the antique capital of elegance—from Constantinople then, as from Paris today.

They still show the gold-inlaid ivory and embossed painted leather knife and spoon scabbard which hung from the master cook's girdle. It is worth a fortune. The knife and spoon handles are of cunning little mosaic work, most beautiful, unique art specimens from middle-age Constantinople.

* * * *

FIRES destroyed the palace. The kitchens, by hazard, remain, completely dismantled these 300 years past. No one seems to know their subsequent history, after the destruction of the palace. But, either as ruins or as kitchens still in working order, one can understond them as good hiding place, for two great iron boxes. In some scare of threatened capture of the city such iron boxes were hastily hid in the kitchens.

They were hid, because they have been found. They discovered two such iron boxes, nearly the size of trunks, in a sealed closet, not of the kitchens themselves, but in a blind hallway beside them.

Others say that the boxes were found in a disused drain of ancient times, which made an excellent hiding place for bulky objects to be flung to safety.

Their contents were a mass of very rusty machinery. The quantity is considerable, and it is visibly an ancient chimes mechanism. Any clockmaker, they say, would recognize it.

It was not only badly rusted, but parts were eaten down thin by rust and broken through. The good pieces are being scraped and polished, and numerous parts too much eaten away by rust are being duplicated by good modern work. Fortunately, there has been always enough to serve as model and dimensions.

What is it?

It is thought to be the original mechanism by which Jacquemart played that "most beautiful of tunes" which Froissart heard.

At some forgotten siege of Dijon it is probable that Jacquemart and all his "works" were hurriedly fetched down from the tower to a place of safety. Later, Jacquemart was put back on the tower. His simpler machinery, to ring hours, was brought back with him, by men perhaps not specialists of more complicated chimes machinery. So the tune mechanism remained hidden—first delayed and then forgotten.

Why not? It might have been in the year 1423! Or the year 1497. Or the year 1506. Long time ago!

Is it the tune?

Is it beautiful? Old Froissart was no fool.

Go look up Froissart at the library. If Froissart said the tune was beautiful, it must be something sweet, indeed, to hear.

Jacquemart, up on his tower, played it last, they say, when Columbus was sailing.

No one remembers to have heard it since.

Now, Jacquemart will play it again next Christmas day. In any case, it must be something great to hear.

Trapping the Ermine.

EXPERTS say that the colder the climate the finer the fur, but the difficulties of obtaining the rare furs are many. Ermine is at its best when the cold is most intense, the tawny weasel coat turning from fawn to yellow, from yellow to cream and then to snow white, according to the latitude and the season.

Fox, lynx, marten, otter and bear the trapper can take with steel traps of a size varying with the game, or even with the clumsy but efficient deadfall; but the ermine, the fur of which is as easily damaged as the finest gauze, must be handled differently.

The hunter, going the rounds of his traps, has noted curious tiny tracks like the dots and dashes of the telegraphic alphabet. Here are little prints slurring into one another in a dash; there, a dead stop, where the quick-eared stoat has paused with beady eyes alert for snow bird or rabbit. Here, again, a clear blank on the snow, where the crafty little forager has dived below the light surface and wriggled forward like a snake to dart up with a plunge of his fangs into the heart-blood of the unwary snow bunting.

From the length of the leaps the trapper judges the age of the ermine. The full-grown ermine has hair too coarse to be damaged by a snare. If, therefore, the tracks indicate a full-grown animal, the trapper suspends the noose of a looped twine or wire across the runway from a bent twig, which, when released, springs upward with a jerk that lifts the ermine off the ground and strangles it.

If the tracks are like the prints of a baby's fingers, close and small, the trapper hopes to capture a pelt fit for a throne cloak. Perfect fur would be marred by the twine snare, so the trapper devises as cunning a death for the ermine as the ermine devises when it darts up through the snow and fixes its spearlike teeth in the throat of a rabbit.

First, the hunter smears his hunting knife with grease; then he lays it across the track. The little ermine comes trotting in dots and dashes, and gallops and dives to the knife. The knife is frosted—ice and steel! Ice turns to water under the warm tongue; steel turns to fire that blisters and holds the foolish little stoat by his inquisitive tongue, a hopeless prisoner, until the trapper arrives.

Queer.

"This match won't light."

"What's the matter with it?"

"I dunno—it lit all right a minute ago."